

## Rich Harvest: a History of the Grange, 1867-1900

ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

"Rich Harvest: a History of the Grange, 1867-1900." *The Annals of Iowa* 43 (1976), 228-229.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.11262>

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*Rich Harvest: A History of the Grange, 1867-1900*, by D. Sven Nordin. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 1974. pp. ix, 273. \$12.00.

"The purpose of this study," the author introduces, "is four-fold. It relates the history of the Patrons of Husbandry in the nineteenth century, shows how the Grange and its growth patterns during the period reflected the influence of one area of settlement upon others, illustrates that there were really two granger movements, and gives credence to the statements made repeatedly by grange leaders that their order was primarily a social and educational fraternity for farmers and their families rather than a medium for political and economic activities." (viii) More concisely, this is an almost painfully self-conscious attempt to revise a time-honored interpretation of a major agricultural organization. It contrasts directly with Solon Justus Buck's 1913 study of a largely spontaneous political movement of aggrieved, generally midwestern farmers organizing to correct a long list of social, economic, and political evils. About all that the two monographs have in common is that they both claim to be histories of the Patrons of Husbandry and grangerism.

Nordin contradicts Buck on three main points: definition, timing, and function. The young author narrowly limits "grangerism" to members of the Patrons of Husbandry and the activities directly and officially associated with that organization. Essentially he has written an *institutional* history of a social organization. Buck, on the other hand, reconstructed a broad social history of what he considered to be an economic-political *movement*. Although Buck is more visionary, Nordin is more precise.

Furthermore, Buck argued that by 1875 the organization was in a precipitous decline and by the 1880s was well nigh defunct. Nordin, however, identifies two Granger movements, two periods of organizational activity and geographic concentration. In the 1870s socioeconomic conditions favored a Grange boom in the Midwest. By the 1890s adverse agricultural conditions in the East encouraged a shift of interest and enthusiasm there. The membership shifted, then, as well as declined, and the demise of the Patrons was never as complete as Buck assumed.

Finally, Nordin re-establishes the social-educational functions of the Grange as the primary ones. Political functions always re-

mained secondary. Opinion was so diffuse and contradictory within the organization that it was impossible to establish a consistent stand on most political issues, anyway. Here the contrast between Nordin and Buck is most obvious. Only three of Nordin's ten chapters dwell on political subjects, and then only to destroy the concept of the Patrons as a political organization. On the other hand, Buck devoted only one chapter to the "Social and Educational Features." Nordin's emphasis supplies needed balance to a distorted picture.

This is not, however, a precedent-breaking study; nor is the author the lonely crusader that he would have us believe. Theodore Saloutos, Robert A. Calvert, and M. Thomas More Bertels, among others, have offered new perspectives on the Patrons of Husbandry before Nordin, and Solon Buck's interpretation of the state "granger" railroad regulatory laws has been supplied the descriptive detail of the social-educational functions of grangerism and so thoroughly attacked the idea of a political-economic movement as D. Sven Nordin. Although generally successful in this revisionist approach, he has not convinced this reviewer that Grange economic activities were unimportant in recruiting members and insignificant as financial endeavors. This reservation aside, Professor Nordin's careful definitions, considered re-evaluations, and aggressively argued judgments provide a refreshing new view of the Patrons of Husbandry, and one that every student of nineteenth century agrarian movements should read.

—David Crosson  
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*Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming, 1607-1972*, by John T. Schlebecker. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1975. pp. xi, 342.

This is the first narrative history of American farming that covers the entire span of years from the earliest colonial settlements to the present. Here the general reader can, with only a few hours of effort, gain a broad overview of the development of commercial agriculture over 365 years. And the effort is quite pain-

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